

PHILOSOPHY 103: BUSINESS AND COMPUTER ETHICS

Fall 2025
Instructor: Kevin Vandergriff
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Units: 3
Class meeting: Online, asynchronous
Office Hours: **T/TH** 4:00 - 5:30, via
Zoom: <https://csus.zoom.us/j/7675376536>

This syllabus and its schedule are subject to change and revision. It is your responsibility to stay up-to-date with the current version of the syllabus. Please check Canvas frequently for updates.

CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Analytical treatment of controversial moral issues which emerge in the business world, e.g., affirmative action, corporate responsibility, the global economy, industry and environmental damage, social effects of advertising, the computer threat to personal privacy, ownership of computer programs. Discussion will focus on basic moral principles and concepts relevant to these issues.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

GOALS
Students will be able to charitably interpret philosophical arguments and positions, critically engage with them, and defend their own relevant theses in a philosophically vigorous fashion.
Students will be equipped with the tools to understand ethical problems as they arise in the context of business and computing.
Students will be able to communicate complicated ideas in a clear, concise, and understandable fashion, and debate difficult ideas with others in a civil, rational manner.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES
Students will be able to describe and evaluate ethical and social values in their historical and cultural contexts.
Students will be able to explain and critically examine social dynamics and issues in their historical and cultural contexts.

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the role of diversity in human society (for example, race, class, age, gender)
Students will be able to explain and apply the basic methods of philosophy to the study of social and individual behaviour.
Students will be able to understand the moral and political issues that affect questions of the appropriate role of corporations in a just society.
Students will be able to apply this understanding to make sense of existing social practices and institutions.
Students will be able to analyse current problems and controversies within business and computing, as well as evaluate proposed solutions to these problems and controversies.

GENERAL EDUCATION: D. The Individual and Society

PRE-REQUISITES

None.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

All readings will be supplied via the Canvas course page, and through the class page on my personal website.

Invaluable resources:

Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu>.

Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <https://iep.utm.com>.

FINAL GRADE WEIGHTS

You will be graded on the following criteria:

1. Quizzes (45%)
2. Discussion Boards (36%)
3. Final Exam/Essay (19%)

Letter grades will be calculated based on the following percentages:

A ≥ 94%, A- ≥ 90% , B+ ≥ 87%, B ≥ 84%, B- ≥ 80%, C+ ≥ 77%, C ≥ 74%, C- ≥ 70%, D ≥ 61% F < 61%

OFFICE HOURS

Office hours will be held each T/TH, 4:00 - 4:45 via Zoom: 767 537 6536

QUIZZES

Throughout the semester, you will be given *at least* fifteen opportunities to participate in a quiz. Quizzes are designed to assess your reading comprehension skills, and understanding of the lectures. Quizzes are designed to provide you with a valuable opportunity to reflect on the assigned reading, ensure that you have understood key points in the texts, and will serve to guide the course of class discussion (in this case on the discussion boards). Quizzes will be composed of multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short answer question formats. Each one of these quizzes will be worth 3 points out of the 45 points available in this category. If you wish to earn a full grade in this category, it is highly recommended that you complete the assigned reading for any given week before attempting that week's assignment. No make-up assessments will be provided.

Quizzes will typically be ten questions long, with each question worth .3 points

DISCUSSION BOARDS

In lieu of in-class, fact-to-face discussions with your fellow students, we will be making use of numerous Canvas discussion boards. 36% of your grade will be evaluated on the basis of these discussions. You will be required to post one original discussion post, in response to one of the assigned questions that I will provide, a minimum of ten times during the semester. Further, you will be required to respond to a *minimum* of two of your fellow students' posts per discussion board to get full points. The discussion board posts will require careful thought and consideration. Original posts will be treated and graded as short essay answers to the posted discussion questions.

Your original discussion posts will be graded on the following scale: Excellent (2), Good (1.5), Satisfactory (1), and Unsatisfactory (0). Failure to submit any assessment will result in a zero grade. Your two responses to your fellow students' posts will each receive 1 point, so long as they represent a sincere effort to: (i) understand the original poster's point, (ii) provide a well-thought-out critical response to it, and (iii) are written in a charitable and polite manner. Please refer to Daniel Dennett's 'Rules for Criticising with Kindness' (see the Classroom Etiquette section, below) for guidance. More detailed information is provided in the Discussion Board Instructions document.

FINAL EXAM / ESSAY

For the final, you will have a choice of either taking a final exam—which will consist in 50 questions covering topics covered over the course of the entire semester—or writing an essay expanding upon one of the issues covered in a discussion board assignment during the semester.

Exam questions will be in multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, matching, and short-answer question format. These questions will test both your knowledge of the assigned readings, and material presented in lectures. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have read all assigned material, and that you take good notes. Slides from each lecture will be provided via Canvas. The exam will be provided through Canvas.

The essay assignment will require that you expand upon one of your discussion board posts, expressing your ideas and arguments in the style of an analytic philosophy paper. The essay option is presented for students who (i) have difficulty in high-stakes exam scenarios, and/or (ii) have an interest in exploring one of the topics they have discussed during the semester in more detail. For a detailed idea of what is expected in an analytic philosophy paper, please consult my Writing a Philosophy Paper handout, as well as the Sac State [Philosophy Department's Writing Guidelines](#).

EXTRA CREDIT

A small opportunity to earn extra credit will be provided to those who attend any of the Department of Philosophy's symposiums during the semester. Information on these events will be provided via canvas when available. Credit will require submitting a short write-up of the events.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Given that this is a philosophy class, it is likely that we will on occasion discuss sensitive and controversial issues. Many of you will have different and opposing views on some of the topics we cover. Whereas I invite you all to participate in a lively debate whenever possible, it is also important that you consider how your behaviour in the classroom adds to, or diminishes, other students' ability to freely and safely engage with the discussion, the course material, and the class as a whole. I will not tolerate *ad hominem*s, rudeness, raised voices, or any other kind of behaviour generally considered inappropriate in a civilised setting. A key component to the argumentative method of philosophical thinking is one's considering opposing views in a *charitable* fashion before critically responding to them—I will hold you to this standard. Repeat offenders will be penalised, and have points deducted from their final grade (one point for each infraction).

I recommend that you all internalise Daniel Dennett's 'Rules for Criticising with Kindness':

How to compose a successful critical commentary:

1. You should attempt to re-express your target's position so clearly, vividly, and fairly that your target says "Thanks, I wish I'd thought of putting it that way."
2. You should list all points of agreement (especially if they are not matters of general or widespread agreement).
3. You should mention anything you have learned from your target.
4. Only then are you permitted to say so much as a word of rebuttal or criticism.

CRISIS ASSISTANCE & RESOURCE EDUCATION SUPPORT

If you are experiencing challenges with food, housing, financial or other unique circumstances that are impacting your education, help is just a phone call or email away. The [CARES](#) office provides case management support for any enrolled student.

SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Sacramento State is committed to ensuring an accessible learning environment where course or instructional content are usable by all students and faculty. If you believe that you require disability-related academic adjustments for this class (including pregnancy-related disabilities), please immediately contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD) to discuss eligibility. A current accommodation letter from SSWD is required before any modifications, above and beyond what is otherwise available for all other students in this class will be provided. Please be advised that disability-related academic adjustments are not retroactive. SSWD is located on the first floor of Lassen Hall 1008. Phone is (916) 278-6955 and e-mail is sswd@csus.edu. For a complete listing of services and current business hours visit the [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) website.

STUDENT HEALTH & COUNSELLING SERVICES

[Student Health and Counselling Services](#) staff are available for virtual and in-person services. During this public health crisis and extended period of limited physical or social interaction, if you need counselling or other physical or mental health services, you should not hesitate to reach out to the Student Health and Counselling centre. For helpful information and access to their services visit their [website](#).

Furthermore, if you find yourself struggling with my class in particular, please do not hesitate to reach out to me. I am here to help, and I can help you identify and make use of the right resources for your situation.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

You are expected to familiarise yourself with the University's policy on academic honesty, which can be found [here](#).

Any student that is caught plagiarising, cheating, or acting in any other academically dishonest fashion will be deducted points from their class grade. A plagiarised essay will receive an F letter grade. Any student caught cheating on a quiz or other kind of assessment will receive a score of 0 for that assessment. Any student caught plagiarising or cheating may also receive an F for their final class grade, and will be reported to Student Affairs for disciplinary action.

For more information, see the CSUS Library's guide to plagiarism [here](#).

EMAIL POLICY

I aim to answer emails within twenty-four hours of receipt on weekdays. You should not expect to get a response immediately on the weekend, but I will do my best to answer as promptly as I can. Please do not email me with a question regarding the syllabus or class schedule without first consulting the syllabus and Canvas course page. Emails should be professionally and politely written. Please ensure that you identify yourself, the course and section you are enrolled in, when writing to me.